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ABSTRACT

A study examined the patterns of schooling and employment reported by noncollege-bound high school graduates between June 1980 and March 1986. Data were obtained from the High School and Beyond (HSB) study extrapolated from a sample of 6,030 graduates who did not enter college in the fall of 1980. The sample had a higher minority population (25 percent) and was somewhat below the HSB average in socioeconomic status; the sample had about equal numbers of males and females. For each month and quarter during the study period, graduates were classified as follows: (1) neither working nor in school; (2) working but not in school; (3) in school but not working, or (4) working and in school. The study found that about 39 percent of the youth were neither working nor in school at the start of the period, but only 20 percent were in this category 6 years later. The study also found that 60 percent of the youth were working but not in school in 1980, increasing to 71 percent by 1986, and that the percent of students in school but not working went from .2 percent to 2 percent in the time frame. Students who were both working and in school increased from less than one-half percent to 7 percent during the 6 years. The most striking finding was that 20 percent of the youths were neither working nor in school 6 years after high school graduation, with this state more common among females than males, and among Hispanics and Blacks than among Whites. However, only a small fraction of the sample could be classified as "underclass." The study also concluded that high school program and test scores made little difference in the positions of graduates 6 years later. An emerging pattern of students being both in school and working, with both delayed college entrance and prolonged attendance, was noted. (KC)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Post-High School Employment and Schooling Patterns of Non-College Bound Youth

Introduction

In contrast to what is provided for those students who go directly to college and perhaps on from there to a professional degree, the educational system provides few ladders from school to work for the non-college bound. However, some educators and policymakers (Meyer, 1982; American Assembly, 1980; Rist, 1980) and many programs at the state, federal, and local levels are now trying to help this particular group of young people.

But there has been relatively little systematic study of the actual patterns of these young peoples' experiences. Most research on educational attainment has centered on college-bound populations and typically has emphasized "on-time" entrance to college and "on-time" completion. Relatively little is known about delayed entrance to postsecondary schooling, or about the switching or combining of work and school roles. Policymakers are left with only the most general notions of what constitutes a successful transition to stable employment for young people who do not go on to college.

The study on which this Brief is based used data collected for the High School and Beyond Study (HSB), conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, on a sample of youth who were high school seniors in 1980. The surveys covered a wide range of topics and produced a substantial amount of data on student backgrounds and school characteristics. Of particular interest to the analysis, respondents were asked to provide detailed histories of jobs held and postsecondary schools attended. For each job and each postsecondary school, respondents were asked to indicate start and stop dates. In addition, respondents filled out a grid indicating interruptions in jobs or schooling.

Students who entered college directly from high school were not included in the analyses, leaving a sample of 6,030 young people who did not enter college in the fall of 1980. This sample has a higher minority representation (about 12 percent Hispanic and 13 percent black) than the total HSB sample, and it is somewhat below the HSB average in socioeconomic status and in test performance. The sample is 48 percent male; 52 percent female.

The purpose of this Brief is to examine the patterns of schooling and employment reported by these graduates between June, 1980 and March, 1986.

Employment and Schooling Experiences

For each month and quarter during this period, student experiences were classified into four categories:

- Neither working nor in school.
- Working, but not in school.
- In school, but not working.
- Working and in school.

1. ***Neither working nor in school.*** At the start of the period, June 1980, 39 percent of non-college bound youth were neither in school nor working. Although this percentage dropped steadily, 20 percent were still neither working nor in school as of March 1986.

2. ***Working, but not in school.*** This is the largest category, and the percentage increased during the six years. In June, 1980, 60 percent of non-college bound youth were working but not in school. By March, 1986, nearly 71 percent fell into this category.

3. ***In school, but not working.*** This is the smallest category. In June 1980, less than half of a percent (0.2%) were in school only; by March 1986, although the percentage had increased, only two percent of this sample were in school but not working.

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4. ***Working and in school.*** In June 1980, less than one-half of a percent (0.4%) were working and attending school, but by March 1986, seven percent were doing both.

Although the general trends were similar for males and females, females were more likely than males to be both out of school and out of work throughout the six-year period.

While all three groups — Hispanics, blacks, and whites — were less likely to be out of school and out of work by the end of the six years, the patterns of their activities were quite different. During much of the six years, for example, blacks were considerably more likely to be attending school than Hispanics, and Hispanics were more likely to be holding jobs than blacks. Whites followed the same trend — a declining but substantial percentage neither working nor in school — but the percentage of whites neither working nor in school was consistently lower than that for blacks and Hispanics.

Although blacks were more likely to return to school, they were more likely to attend vocational/technical schools than either whites or Hispanics and less likely to be attending four-year colleges than whites. Those who attended four-year colleges were males, individuals from high-SES backgrounds, and those who scored higher on HSB achievement tests.

But when they did return to school, blacks were more likely than whites or Hispanics to attend full-time. Similarly, males, individuals from high-SES backgrounds, and those who scored higher on the HSB achievement tests were more likely to attend school full-time.

Transitions

To try to understand the transitions among the four schooling and employment states (neither in school nor working, working only, working and attending school at the same time, and in school only), the researchers looked at three types of factors that they thought might be significant. (The analysis of the transitions and the factors affecting them is

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based on a regression analysis of the HSB data.)

1. Background characteristics, such as sex, race, ethnicity, age, and academic achievement.

2. High school experiences, such as whether a student was in the vocational, general, or academic track; the number of vocational courses taken; and the number of hours per week a student worked at a job.

3. Employment and educational history since high school graduation, including the length of time in each transitional state.

Patterns of school-to-work and work-to-school transitions

Stability from one quarter to the next was the rule. The greatest stability was among youth who were working but not in school. Ninety percent of the time, those who were working but not in school in a given quarter persisted in this state the following quarter. Only six percent of this group was in school in the next quarter.

Among those youth who were neither employed nor in school during a particular quarter, three-fourths remained in that state for at least part of the succeeding quarter. Only seven percent of the youth who were neither employed nor in school attended school in the following quarter, and only two percent combined work and school.

There was substantially less continuity among youth attending school but not working. Only about 60 percent of this group persisted in school in the next quarter. Over 25 percent of youth who were in school but not working in a given quarter were neither working nor in school in the following quarter. For youth who do not attend college immediately after high school, the "school only" category is the least stable.

Another unstable state was "attending school and employed at the same time." Only two-thirds of these youth remained in this state in the following quarter. Thirty-five percent had continued to work but had dropped school.

Determinants of the transitions

1. Remaining unemployed and out of school.

Few of the studied variables had large effects on the probability of remaining unemployed and out of school. Females and youths who scored lower on the HSB standardized tests were five percent more likely to remain in this state. The effects of race and social class, while statistically significant, were quite small. Youths in rural and suburban areas were slightly more likely to remain out of school and out of work than urban youth. There is only slight evidence that high school experiences had an impact on the likelihood of remaining in this state: Students in the academic track in school were 2.5% less likely to remain out of work and out of school than those who had been in general tracks, but enrollment in a vocational track in high school had no determining effect.

Post-high school experiences had an impact. Youths who were out of school and out of work for a longer period of time were more likely to remain in that state than those in that state for a shorter time. A youth out of work and out of school for two years was ten percent more likely to remain in that state than a youth who had been in that state for only one quarter.

2. From neither working nor attending school to working only.

The most likely to make this transition were males, whites, and those who scored higher on the HSB tests. There was little evidence that high school experiences made much difference. Specific vocational preparation in high school had no sizeable effect on this transition, although youths who had worked more hours while in high school were more likely to make this move.

A youth who worked 40 hours a week in high school was about four percent more likely to make this transition than a comparable youth who worked only ten hours a week.

One post-high school experience — the length of time since high school — had a significant impact. The transition from being unemployed and out of school to "work only" is much more likely to take place in the first year after high school than in any of the following five years.

3. From neither working nor attending school to being in school only.

This rare transition was more frequently made by blacks and Hispanics and youths from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Students who had been in the academic track in high

Origin State	The Next Quarter*	
	Most Likely Transition	Second Most Likely
Work Only	Work Only (90%)	Neither (11%)
Neither School Nor Work	Neither (75%)	Work only (33%)
Both School and Work	Both (66%)	Work only (35%)
School Only	School only (62%)	Neither (26%)

*Percentages can add up to greater than 100% because there is some overlap within a given quarter.

school were three percent more likely to make this transition than those who had been in the general track — a statistically significant but surprisingly small amount. Another surprise is that HSB test scores had no significant impact on this transition. There were no effects from specific vocational course work.

4. From neither working nor attending school to combining work and school.

This rare transition is made by basically the same categories of youths who made the transition to being in school only. However, academic placement in high school had no effect on this transition. The longer that young people had been both out of work and out of school the less likely they were to combine school and work at some point.

5. From work only to neither working nor attending school.

Women were five percent more likely to make this transition than men, and whites were slightly more likely than blacks or Hispanics. There were no major track differences affecting who made this transition, but youths who took business or sales courses in high school were slightly less likely to stop working. The longer youths had been working the less likely they were to move to neither working nor attending school.

6. Continuing in the state of working only.

Males and whites were more likely to continue in this state. This "transition" was relatively unaffected by high school experiences, but youth who had been in academic tracks were less likely to remain working only. Youth were more likely to stay "working only" during the first year after high school than in the following years.

7. From working only to school only.

Blacks, Hispanics, youths from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and those who had higher test scores were more likely than others to make this transition, but the effects were very small. Surprisingly, there was no evidence of high school track effects on the probability of this transition, although vocational students were very slightly less likely to give up work for school than general-track youth.

The likelihood of moving from work to school was lowest during the first year after high school. The longer that young people had been working, the less likely they were to stop working and enroll in school.

8. From working only to combining work and school.

Students from academic tracks were more likely to add school to work than those from general tracks. This transition was more likely to occur after the first year out of high school, and young people who had been working longer were less likely to add school to their work obligations.

9. From school only to being neither employed nor in school.

Higher-SES youth and those with higher test scores were less likely to leave school. Youth from vocational tracks were more likely to leave school and move to a state of neither employed nor in school than similar general or academic track students. But those who took business or sales courses were slightly less likely to discontinue school and not work.

10. From school only to working only.

Whites were more likely to drop school to go to a job. But students' social class and academic high school standing were not related to the substitution of work for school. The longer a youth had been in school following high school, the more likely he or she was to leave school to go to work.

11. Continuing in school only.

The social background and high school records of the respondents were unrelated to the probability of their remaining in school only.

12. From school only to combining school and work.

Whites were more likely than others to add work to school. No other social background factors predict this transition. Youths with higher test scores added work to their school load more often than those with lower scores.

13. From combining school and work to doing neither.

This is a rare transition — only six percent of those both working and attending school were neither employed nor in school in the next quarter. Women were three percent more likely to make this transition than males, but no other student characteristic was a strong predictor of this transition. Youths who had been both working and attending school for any length of time covered by the study (year 2 through year 6) were no more likely to stop doing both than those who had just begun doing both.

14. From combining school and work to working only.

Whites were five percent more likely to leave school but continue working, and women were three percent more likely than men to make this change. Individuals with higher test scores were slightly less likely to go from combining school and work to just working. Youths who worked 30 hours a week while in high school were two percent more likely to discard school after combining school and work than youths who worked ten hours a week in high school. Youths who were new to combining work and school were more likely to give up school than those who had been combining work and school for a longer time.

15. From combining school and work to school only.

Blacks and higher-SES youth were slightly more likely to make this transition. Students' high school experiences did not predict which youth combining school and work would drop work and continue schooling. Youth combining school and work for longer time periods were unlikely to stop working.

16. Continued involvement in both school and work.

Women were four percent less likely than men to continue combining school and work, but racial or ethnic backgrounds and SES were not related to persistence in combining school and work. Students with higher test scores and students who were in an academic track were slightly more likely to continue combining the two activities. Spe-

Institute on Education and the Economy
Box 174, Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027
212-678-3091
Director: Thomas R. Bailey

cific vocational course work was unrelated to continuity of school and work.

Discussion

1. ***Employment and schooling.*** The most striking finding is that such a large proportion of youth in the sample — 20 percent — were neither employed nor in school six years after high school graduation. This condition was more common among females than males, and among Hispanics and blacks than among whites. The breakdown was as follows:

Neither employed nor in school, March, 1986.

Total sample	20.3%
Males	17.1
Females	24.0
Hispanics	21.5
Blacks	26.1
Whites	19.2

What makes this finding surprising is that only a small fraction of the sample can be characterized as members of the "underclass." The sample consists of 1980 high school seniors surveyed late in the school year, and nearly all of them graduated from high school. The underclass phenomenon has primarily been associated with high school dropouts.

Another striking finding is that nearly three-fourths of the youth who were enrolled in school during this six-year period were also employed. In earlier decades, this pattern of simultaneous employment and schooling was considered an "off-time" event, in the sense that the individual was not following the usual direct high school-to college-to job path. Certain kinds of off-time events are believed to have negative effects on a variety of socioeconomic outcomes. However, working while attending school may no longer be as off-time as it used to be. The distinction between school and work is beginning to fade. Whether holding a job while attending school is negative or positive may depend on how the individual interprets the situation or defines himself or herself in relation to it.

2. ***Transitions.***

The data show a substantial amount of fluidity in the early careers of youth who do not enter college directly after high school, but the transition patterns are not easily explicable by the tried-and-true indicators of social background, such as racial/ethnic group or family socioeconomic status.

Young people with higher SES backgrounds were more likely to move from being both unemployed and out of school to school alone or to both school and work; were less likely to leave school to be neither in school nor employed; and were more likely to be in school only or to combine school and work. However, the employment and educational differences between higher SES students and lower SES students were very small.

Contrary to what one might expect, blacks and Hispanics were more likely to move from being neither employed nor in school to being in school, were more likely to stop working to enroll in school, and were less likely to leave school for work, than similar white youth.

It is clear that the HSB test scores of the youth in the sample were weak predictors of movement between the various states of employment and schooling. Moreover, high school curriculum placement and course work — that is, whether non-college bound youth were in academic or vocational tracks — seem to have had little bearing on whether youth attend school or persist in efforts to continue their schooling.

These findings can be read in two ways — one positive and one troubling. The positive implication is that, in the period of young adulthood, the non-college bound are not constrained by their high school experiences. Poor high school performance, as evidenced by low high school test scores, does not prove to be an insurmountable barrier to further education. In this sense, the system seems to maintain access to education and training regardless of how poorly the youth did in high school.

The troubling implication can be posed as a question: Although they may have *access* to further education, is the quality of training that non-college bound youth receive in postsecondary institutions so undemanding and unchallenging that the level of young people's preparation and performance in high school makes little difference?

Overall, the results suggest that the critical branching point is not — as many educators and policy makers have long thought — *whether* one goes to postsecondary school, but *when* one does. The evidence now is that although many non-college-bound youth acquire some postsecondary education, the consequences of that education are less positive than for those who go directly to college. This is not necessarily a result of the timing; it may simply be a reflection of the life circumstances of the groups who go directly to college and those who do not.

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This Brief is a distillation of two unpublished papers by Aaron Pallas, Gary Natriello, and Edward McDill, entitled *The Forgotten Half Move On: Post-High School Employment and Schooling Patterns of Non-College Bound Youth* (July, 1990), and *Change and Stability in the Post-High School Employment and Schooling Patterns of Non-College Bound Youth* (August, 1990). The study was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation and administered through the Institute on Education and Economy.